

Appleby Archaeology group enjoyed a welcomed return visit from Jamie Lund, the archaeologist for the North West Region of National Trust, who spoke about recent historic landscape surveys in Buttermere and Loweswater.

Jamie began by outlining his work with the “Trust” in recording historic landscapes and explained that the surveys provided insight into how the land was used in the past and helped the “Trust” plan the future management of the land and buildings.

A number of areas have been surveyed in Cumbria including Great Langdale, Wasdale Head and Hartsop in the Ullswater Valley. One of the “Trust’s” aims is to help local people to develop new skills and improve their knowledge of the landscape in which they live.

The survey work at Buttermere and Loweswater was undertaken in 2008 by Oxford Archaeology North and the Lorton and Derwent Fells Local History Society.

Oxford Archaeology North field walked areas of land owned by the National Trust and found 400 sites and monuments. Several examples of prehistoric activity were discovered including examples of rock art in the form of cup marks, burial mounds and cairns.

One intriguing feature was a burnt mound. In 1999 none had been recorded in the North Pennines but now thirty have been noted although only one was found in this survey. These Bronze Age mounds, found near water and containing a hearth, are typically kidney shaped and made up of fired cracked pebbles and charcoal. They are associated with a sort of wooden trough which suggests that they may have been used for heating water but their function remains elusive. Theories include that they were used as saunas, breweries and for cooking and outside feasting.

Several previously documented sites were re-assessed. One example was a circular site projecting into the lake at Crummnock Water which was previously scheduled as medieval and thought to be a defended site. However evidence of earthworks on the landward side suggest there may have been earlier occupation, possibly in the late prehistoric period or as iron age promontory fort. Evidence of an earlier landscape was also seen at Runnerdale at a site

documented as a medieval. The landscape there was similar to a “scooped” settlement at the foot of Grassmoor which consists of an outer bank enclosing hut platforms and nearby cairn fields. This site is thought to have been occupied in the late Iron Age or in the Romano British period. These findings emphasised the importance of re-examining sites.

Members of The Lorton and Derwent Fells Local History Society undertook a similar survey on the covenanted land in the area. Prior to field walking, they had consulted ordnance survey maps and the “Trust’s” sites and monuments records so that they were aware of the known sites. They formed three small groups, which under Jamie’s the guidance surveyed three areas Loweswater, Brackenthwaite and Scales Beck. They were instructed to measure, record and photograph anything of interest.

All the groups had success and identified 117 sites in total. One of the important finds was the remains of a iron bloomery (iron smelter) that had been used from around 1250-1500 AD. Another was the site of a corn mill at Brackenthwaite located by finding signs of the mill leat. The central part of a grinding stone was found and identified as a type from the Paris Basin which was probably brought over in the mid 19th century. Another find was a fragment of a perforated tile which had probably formed part of the drying kiln floor.

Thirty charcoal burning platforms were discovered in woodland at Scale Beck and there was also evidence of rectangular buildings on the land used for rough grazing. These buildings may have been medieval dwellings, long houses or sheilings.

Single roomed structures of dry stone found in the uplands suggest sheilings settlements used in the summer when the animals were grazing the uplands and the lowland sites were used to grow crops. The upland settlements may have become more permanent at the time of the Tudor expansion but the land would have become quickly exhausted and the people would have had to move on.

The local history groups and the professional archaeologists compiled reports of their finds and conclusions giving an insight into the historic environment and helping the “Trust” with its future management,

The Local History Society put on an exhibition during National Archaeology Week 2008 and its

220 visitors showed how the “Trust” was fulfilling its goal of involving local people. The Society members are hoping to do more survey work in 2009 possibly at Brandle How, Cats Bells and Derwentwater..

Jamie answered a number of questions before being thanked and warmly applauded.

The next talk will be on Tuesday 10 April 114th at 7.30pm, in the Supper Room, Market Hall, in the Appleby, when Patricia Shaw, North Pennines Archaeology will speak on *The Bronze Age in Cumbria -Burials Unearthed*